

Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 EB-08
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S E C R E T RABAT 4430

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MO
SUBJ: GOM INTEREST IN PURCHASE OF A-10 AIRCRAFT

REF: STATE 154935, 021406Z JUL 77

1. THIS TELEGRAM RESPONDS TO THE QUESTIONS POSED BY
PARAGRAPH 4 OF REFTEL CONCERNING THE GOM'S INTEREST IN
PURCHASING THE A-10 AIRCRAFT.
2. EVALUATION OF GOM ESTIMATE OF THE THREAT TO BE COUNTERED
BY THE A-10:
 - A. THE GOM DESCRIBES THIS THREAT AS THE ALGERIAN TANK
FORCE OF 300 - 400 AND LIBYAN TANK FORCE OF 700 (OUR FIGURES
ARE 450 AND 700 RESPECTIVELY), WHICH COULD BE DEPLOYED IN
EITHER AN ALL-OUT ATTACK OR IN LIMITED BORDER INCURSIONS
ALONG THE LONG (AND, FOR A CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE, UNDEFINED)
BORDER). ALTHOUGH THE LATTER IS MORE LIKELY, THE GOM BELIVES
IT MUST BE ABLE TO COUNTER A FULL-SCALE ATTACK. SINCE
ECONOMIC REALITIES PRECLUDE GREATLY INCREASING ITS ARMORED
FORCES AND PURCHASING LARGE NUMBERS OF TANKS AND THE FUEL
TO RUN THEM, THE GOM PROPOSES TO REDUCE THE IMBALANCE BY
QUALITATIVE RATHER THAN QUANTITATIVE MEANS.

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- B. IN THE MOROCCAN CONTEXT, A FULL-SCALE ATTACK
WOULD MOST LIKELY BE A TWO-PRONGED OFFENSIVE FROM ALGERIA
AIMED AT THE TAZA AND MIDELT GAPS SUPPORTED BY TACTICAL
FIGHTER/BOMBER AIRCRAFT AND MOBILE ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS AND
MISSILES. AGAINST SUCH AN ATTACK THE "TANK-KILLER" A-10
WOULD BE USEFUL, BUT WE CONSIDER THE SMALLEST COMBAT-
EFFECTIVE, ECONOMICAL BUY IN SUCH A SCENARIO TO BE 24.

THE GOM MAY ALSO BELIEVE THAT ACQUISITION OF THE A-10 WOULD SERVE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERRENT TO A POSSIBLE ALGERIAN ATTACK.

C. THE MORE LIKELY EVENTUALITY, OF BORDER INCURSIONS WITH ARMOR, COULD BE MET EFFECTIVELY BY THE A-10, WHOSE FLEXIBILITY MAKES IT A HIGHLY CREDIBLE DETERRENT.

3. ALTERNATIVES TO THE A-10:

A. INCREASE MOROCCO'S TANK FORCE: AT \$5-7 MILLION EACH, 24 A-10'S, COSTING UP TO \$168 MILLION, COULD REPRESENT 250 M48A5 TANKS. THIS WOULD RAISE MOROCCO'S TANK FORCES TO A TOTAL OF 463 (OF WHICH 350 WOULD BE U.S.-SUPPLIED). THE GOM HAS INDICATED THAT THE CURRENT STRENGTH OF ITS ARMED FORCES (APPROX. 90,000) IS THE PRACTICAL PEACETIME LIMIT THAT IS SUPPORTABLE WITHOUT SERIOUS ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES. TWENTY-FOUR A-10'S WOULD REQUIRE AN ADDITIONAL THREE HUNDRED PERSONNEL, ASSUMING THAT EXISTING SYSTEMS (F-5, C-130, ETC.) WERE MAINTAINED. A DOLLAR-EQUIVALENT INCREASED TANK FORCE OF AN ADDITIONAL TWO-HUNDRED AND FIFTY (250) TANKS WOULD INCREASE THE STRENGTH LEVEL BY AT LEAST 3,500.

B. OBTAIN ADDITIONAL TOW ANTI-TANK WEAPONS MOUNTED ON GROUND VEHICLES SUCH AS THE M-151 1/4-TON TRUCK AND M113A1 IMPROVED TOW VEHICLE: THE TERRAIN OF THE TAZA AND MIDELT GAPS WOULD CONSTRICT ATTACKING ARMOR FORCES, CREATING GOOD TARGETS FOR THE GROUND-BASED DEFENDING FORCES, BUT AT THE COST OF LONG, HARD FIGHTING, DEEP INSIDE MOROCCO.

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C. ADD TO THE GROUND-BASED TOW'S: THIS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY TOW CARRYING HELICOPTERS (AH-1S) EMPLOYED FORWARD OF THE MAIN DEFENSE POSITIONS IN AMBUSH OR HUNTER-KILLER TEAMS. A UNIT OF 24 TOW HELICOPTERS, WHICH COULD BE EFFECTIVE IN THIS ROLE, WOULD REQUIRE AN ADDITIONAL MANNING LEVEL OF APPROXIMATELY 325 AND COST AROUND \$1 MILLION PER HELICOPTER. HOWEVER, WITHOUT GOM AIR SUPERIORITY, THE TOW HELICOPTER COULD NOT SURVIVE AS LONG AS THE A-10. IN THE AIR, ALGERIA HAS A NINE TO ONE EDGE IN COMBAT AIRCRAFT.

IN SUMMARY, THE TANK ALTERNATIVE IS TOO COSTLY FOR THE GOM AND COULD BE SEEN AS A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT TO TIP THE REGIONAL IMBALANCE. TOW OPTIONS SUFFER FROM SLOW REACTION TIME, LIMITED USEFULNESS IN COUNTERING SCATTERED BORDER INCURSIONS, AND LIMITED HELICOPTER SURVIVABILITY WITHOUT AIR SUPERIORITY. THEY ARE, HOWEVER, CLEARLY DEFENSIVE AND THUS UNPROVOCATIVE. THE A-10 OPTION COMBINES QUICK REACTION, A CREDIBLE DETERRENT TO BORDER INCURSIONS, AND A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST TO THE GOM AND, GIVEN THE ALGERIAN ACQUISITION OF THE MIG-23, ITS PURCHASE SHOULD NOT BE UNDULY PROVOCATIVE TO ALGERIA. IT IS, HOWEVER, SO EXPENSIVE AS TO BE A QUESTIONABLE BUY IN TERMS OF OVERALL GOM RESOURCES.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS:

RABAT'S 3891 SET FORTH THE JUSTIFICATION OF OUR EFFORTS TO PRESERVE REGIONAL STABILITY IN NORTH AFRICA IN ORDER (A) TO PRECLUDE POSSIBLE BIG POWER CONFRONTATION, AND (B) TO REINFORCE OUR VALUABLE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MOROCCO (AND FOR THAT MATTER ALGERIA). IN THIS CONTEXT THE PURCHASE OF THE A-10 SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SECURITY INTERESTS SO LONG AS IT DOES NOT RAISE OUR SUPPORT BEYOND THE LEVEL NECESSARY TO PROVIDE MOROCCO WITH THE MINIMUM CREDIBLE DETERRENT TO MEET THE ALGERIAN THREAT. ALTHOUGH ONE CAN ARGUE THAT OTHER ALTERNATIVES MIGHT BE BETTER, THE SALE OF THE A-10 CERTAINLY FALLS INTO THIS CATEGORY.

THE REGIMES IN ALGERIA AND LIBYA HAVE RECEIVED A
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HIGH LEVEL OF SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE. U.S. SALE OF A-10'S WOULD NOT BE LIKELY TO TRIGGER INCREASED SOVIET MILITARY SUPPORT FOR ALGERIA. IT IS MORE LIKELY TO DISCOURAGE ANY TEMPTATION FOR ALGERIA TO INITIATE LARGE-SCALE HOSTILITIES. ADDITIONALLY, MOROCCAN ACQUISITION OF A-10 COULD DETER ANY ALGERIAN ESCALATION IN SUPPORT OF POLISARIO GUERRILLAS IN THE SAHARA, WHERE THE A-10 COULD BE USED EFFECTIVELY AGAINST HOSTILE VEHICLES IN DESERT COMBAT.

5. CONSEQUENCES FOR USG-GOM BILATERAL RELATIONS OF DECISION NOT TO SELL THE A-10:

SINCE THE GOM HAS NEVER FORMALLY REQUESTED THE A-10 PENDING AN INDICATION OUR REACTION, WE ARE UNCLEAR AS TO THE DEPTH OF ITS REAL INTEREST. FURTHERMORE, DURING UNDER SECRETARY BENSON'S VISIT TO RABAT HER SPECIAL ASSISTANT INFORMED THE MOROCCANS THAT WE HAVE SO FAR OFFERED THE A-10 ONLY TO OUR NATO ALLIES (RABAT 3852).

I DO NOT CONCLUDE THAT THE A-10 IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE FOR THE MOROCCAN ARSENAL IF INDEED THERE ARE COMPELLING U.S. POLICY REASONS FOR DENYING ITS SALE. IT APPEARS, HOWEVER, TO BE A USEFUL, MOBILE, BUT EXPENSIVE COUNTERWEIGHT TO A VERY REAL THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF A COUNTRY WE ARE ASSISTING TO MAINTAIN A MINIMUM BELIEVEABLE DETERRENT.

I WOULD, THEREFORE, APPRECIATE ANY FURTHER GUIDANCE ON THE PRELIMINARY WASHINGTON REACTION TO THIS CABLE BEFORE DECIDING HOW TO HANDLE ANY FUTHER DISCUSSION WITH THE GOM ON THE A-10.

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Message Attributes

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